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SUBJECT: LEARNING LESSONS, LOOKING AHEAD ON ELECTION
SECURITY

REF: KABUL 2914

¶1. (SBU) Summary: As noted reftel, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Afghan security forces continue to improve their cooperation on voter registration security. In the wake of an attack on completed voter registration materials in Wardak province, representatives from the IEC, Ministry of Interior (MOI), Ministry of Defense (MOD), National Directorate of Security (NDS) and ISAF compared their incident logs, shared intelligence information and analysis, reviewed missteps, and collaboratively identified "lessons learned" for future incidents. The developing spirit of cooperation and teamwork, as well as police pledges to improve performance, suggest that Phases 1 and 2 of voter registration are serving as a useful practice for the greater security challenges ahead in the south in Phases 3 and 4.

ARMED MEN SEIZE MATERIALS IN WARDAK

¶2. (SBU) On November 6, armed men of unknown affiliation attacked an unscheduled convoy transferring completed registration materials from Jalrayz district to the provincial capital of Wardak. Cognizant of violence in the area, IEC headquarters had planned to move the material by air. The Jalrayz district electoral official (district field coordinator, or DFC) decided, however, to accept the police's written invitation urging him to join their convoy as they departed the district. The DFC did not contact IEC headquarters. The police and the attackers fought for over four hours, with four attackers killed and three police wounded. The IEC's driver and his assistant, employees of a transport firm, were kidnapped and have not yet been released. The attackers seized or burned data on 1,360 voters as well as blank voter registration forms.

¶3. (SBU) Many details of the attack remain unclear. The security forces and the IEC agree that they cannot conclusively determine the affiliation of the attackers; some reports say the attackers were Taliban, some say "local Taliban," some say Hizb-e-Islami (HIG). On November 12 Afghan National Army Colonel Mo'men noted with exasperation that the Ministry of Defense had produced five reports on the incident, yet the motive of the attackers was still unknown. The NDS on November 12 reported that its sources confirmed that the transport driver had no connection to the Taliban, suggesting that the common scenario of complicity between transport drivers and their would-be attackers did not occur. NDS also noted its sources reported no threat at the time of the movement. The MOI has yet to determine why the police were departing Jalrayz.

LEARNING LESSONS TOGETHER

¶3. (SBU) In a series of meetings, the IEC, the Afghan security forces, ISAF, and UN technical advisors identified together three "lessons learned" from the Wardak incident.

-- First, the greatest failure was a lack of communication through the chains of commands. The Jelrayz DFC did not notify the Provincial Electoral Officer (PEO) or IEC headquarters of his decision to make an unscheduled move. The police in Jelrayz did not notify the provincial or regional security coordination centers of their decision to leave the district. In turn, the Afghan National Army and ISAF forces learned of the move only after the attack was underway. ANA and ISAF representatives noted that their organizations did not receive actionable information or a specific request for assistance.

-- Second, the provincial and regional levels for all the organizations can play an immediate role in addressing problems, but only when officials respect the established chain of command. In the November 6 incident, information flowed from those involved in the incident to the various headquarters, bypassing the levels closest to the scene and snarling efforts to deploy more forces.

-- Third, only the IEC has authority to decide whether materials move or not. The IEC must coordinate information from the security agencies and communicate its plans to them. The police and the army do not, however, have the authority

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to modify or overrule the IEC's plans, as the IEC is ultimately responsible for election materials.

¶4. (SBU) Separately, the IEC is taking steps to improve its ability to respond to such incidents. It is tightening procedures in its headquarters operations center, to create a more useful log of events and allow better decision-making. In current procedures for transport from the district to the provincial center, both copies of the completed voter registration forms move together; the IEC now is examining advantages and disadvantages to separating the forms at the district level and moving the two identical data sets separately. The IEC on November 17 again pressed its request that ISAF designate a liaison to the IEC operations center; ISAF's initial response on November 12 was negative.

¶5. (SBU) The election security players on November 17 debated together how to adjust plans for the return of other Phase 1 materials from Wardak to avoid any recurrence of the failures of November 6. The PEO reports that materials in four districts are under threat and should be moved to the provincial capital and IEC headquarters as soon as possible. The IEC is investigating all transportation options, including requests for Afghanistan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC) and ISAF air support.

PHASES 3 AND PHASE 4 LOOK TOUGHER BUT POSSIBLE

¶6. (SBU) Despite the greater security challenges ahead for the troubled Phase 3 provinces of Zabul, Paktika, and Khost (Farah, Nangarhar, and Laghman are relatively calm), and the substantially greater challenges in Nimroz, Uruzgan, Kandahar and Helmand for Phase 4, prospects for improved and integrated planning and response on voter registration security look good. The IEC on November 12 shared its district-level threat assessments for Phases 3 and 4 with MOI and MOD representatives. Reviewing this mixed picture, the MOI's Colonel Almas underscored the police's commitment to provide security to allow the IEC open and operate for thirty days every voter registration center, from the 43 sites the

IEC has in "low threat" areas to the 9 sites it has plans for in areas "under enemy control." Colonel Mo'men seconded this sentiment for the MOD. He added that, unlike Phases 1 and 2, the Army has forces in every district of these provinces, giving it more capability and flexibility to support the police.

WOOD